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ON THE CIVILIZATION OF THE INDIANS IN BR. AMERICA - SELKIRK



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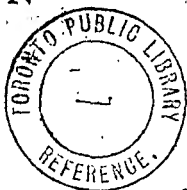
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OF the many attempts which have been made by benevolent individuals and associations, for the instruction and civilization of savages in various parts of the world, a very few only have succeeded : but by an attentive comparison of the methods which have proved successful, and of those which have failed, we shall arrive at principles, upon which we may act with confidence in future undertakings.

One very common cause of failure has been the attempt to inculcate religious and moral instruction, without a sufficient basis of the habits of civilization. The Jesuits and other Missionaries, by great address and uncommon perseverance, have sometimes succeeded in persuading savage tribes to adopt the Christian Religion ; but in all cases where they have confined their attention solely to

this object, their instructions have proved to be completely superficial ; and their proselytes have relapsed into their original ignorance and idolatry, as soon as the care of the Missionaries has been withdrawn or relaxed.

In those cases where attention has been paid to introduce the improvements of civilized life, as well as the light of religion, many failures have arisen from an attempt to do too much at once—to convert a set of complete savages immediately into a civilized society. The children of Indians have in some instances been taken from their parents at an early age, and have received a complete European education ; but these lads upon arriving at manhood, and returning among their countrymen, have generally relapsed into all the habits of savage life. In a few instances the result has been different, but not more satisfactory.—Some one or two Indians, educated at great expence and trouble, may have remained among the European Settlers, but associating with them only, and in no degree contributing to the progress of improvement among the natives in general.

From these facts, it appears clear, that no effectual progress can take place in the civilization of the Indians, unless it be made by a whole tribe together, or at least by such a number as may form a society among themselves, and by the effect of

mutual example, preserve the improvements which they have acquired. In a nation of wandering hunters, it would serve little purpose to convert one of them into a complete farmer, while the rest remain with their habits unchanged. But if any considerable number can be induced to make an attempt at cultivation, even on the smallest scale, an important point will be gained.

The natural progress of civilization has always been very slow : and if we look back to the early history of the most distinguished nations of Europe, we find that they have advanced from barbarism to civilization, by steps so minute as to be almost imperceptible at the time ; and that these have succeeded each other so gradually as to occupy centuries. This progress may be accelerated in some degree ; but there is no probability of any solid benefit, unless we follow the order of nature. A very small improvement, generally diffused among a whole tribe of Indians, and firmly established by custom, will facilitate the introduction of farther improvements ; and thus a great change may be ultimately effected, though an attempt to accomplish the whole at once, could lead to nothing but disappointment and disgust.

Of all the Protestants who have attempted the introduction of Christianity, among savage tribes, the Moravians have been among the most success-

ful; and their practice, especially of late years, has approached more nearly to these principles than that of any other Missionaries. Another very remarkable illustration of these principles is to be found in the improvements lately effected among the Indians of the Ohio. Not many years ago, an association was formed among the Quakers of Philadelphia, for the purpose of promoting the civilization of these tribes; and through the patient and assiduous attention of the persons employed by them, a most important revolution has been effected in the ideas of the Indians respecting agriculture. Before this time they were not entirely ignorant of the art; but it was carried on among them in a very feeble manner by the women alone. They were possessed of no better implement than a hoe; and it was thought beneath the dignity of a man to attend to such an occupation. This prejudice has been removed. The cultivation of the ground is now the employment of the men: they manage the plough with dexterity, and have adopted other more elaborate refinements of mechanism. They have erected mills and saw mills; and in place of the rude huts, with which they were formerly content, they are possessed of comfortable houses. Hunting now forms, not their occupation, but their occasional amusement; and the women, no longer condemned to unceasing

drudgery, have an opportunity of attending to the domestic cares, which are the proper duty of their sex.

The details of this very interesting experiment have been published several years ago, and are well calculated to animate the friends of humanity to similar efforts in other parts of the world. Many excellent men have indeed felt it as a reproach to this nation, that so little should have been done, or even attempted, in British America, while so much has been effected by our neighbours. If these views should ripen into active measures, it is of great consequence that the efforts to which they lead should not only be conducted on good general principles, but directed by a correct view of the actual state of those tribes, for whose benefit they are intended.

The Indians in the British dominions, may be distinguished into three classes, differing widely from each other.

Those of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are now reduced to a few scattered families, who are in a very degraded situation, so entirely corrupted by the immoderate use of spirituous liquors, that any attempt to reclaim them may be esteemed almost desperate. Any prospect of amendment must be founded on the amalgamation of this remnant of the natives with the European

population, to which there is no obstacle, except their slothful habits, and their incapacity to resist any present temptation. Their circumstances differ very little from those of the gypsies in this country; and if they are to be reclaimed, it can only be by methods which would be equally applicable to any description of inveterate vagrants.

~~In Canada some of the Indians~~ are nearly in the same degraded state; but there are also numerous tribes, who have made considerable progress in the useful arts, and of whom great hopes might be entertained, if they were in some particulars more fortunately situated.—The chief obstacles to their farther progress arise from the near vicinity of the European settlers, from whom they seldom learn any thing but the vices of civilized life.

The territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, and other extensive regions lying to the north-west of Canada, are inhabited by a great variety of Indians differing widely from each other. None of them are in a very advanced stage of society, but several of the tribes are numerous, accustomed to a considerable degree of subordination to their chiefs, and in many respects prepared for a further progress in civilization. Nothing, however, has been done to facilitate their improvement. The Missionaries, who are maintained at the expence of Government, for the moral and religious instruc-

tion of the Indians in Canada, have never extended their labours beyond the immediate vicinity of the European Settlements, and the distant countries to the north-west remain entirely neglected.

The Hudson's Bay Company have, indeed, always been disposed to promote education among the natives: but their attention has been chiefly directed to the children of half-blood, reared about their Factories, in consequence of the connection of their European servants with Indian women. Though the Company have been liberal, in affording opportunities of instruction to these children, there has been no systematic plan adopted for the purpose; and as it has been left to the discretion of their chief officers, the object has not always been equally attended to. More might certainly have been accomplished, if there had been a separate fund specifically set apart for the purposes of education.

Of the Indians who inhabit these territories, very few have any knowledge of agriculture. In general, they have no fixed habitations, and subsist entirely by hunting and fishing. Those who inhabit the plains to the westward of Lake Winipic, live, for the most part, in great abundance, but a supply of provisions depending on the chase never can be regular. In the most plentiful districts there are seasons when the supply fails, and such

accidents are frequent in the more barren parts of the country. The natives never have foresight enough to lay up a sufficient stock of provisions in reserve for times of scarcity; and consequently they are often reduced to the greatest extremity of distress. To people in this state the most important of all improvements would be, to make them apply to the cultivation of the ground; so that they might obtain a less precarious supply of provisions. This improvement naturally leads to the establishment of fixed habitations. Though the men must be expected to remain attached to their accustomed pursuits of hunting and fishing, their families will be relieved from many immediate hardships; and the greater regularity in their mode of life, will afford an opportunity of forming their children to habits of industry and steady application, which are utterly unattainable by those who are brought up in their present style of life. The probable effects of this change upon the moral improvement of the Indians, are too evident to require illustration.

With a view to the practical accomplishment of these objects, two different plans may be proposed. One is to employ Missionaries to live among the wandering Indians, to gain their confidence, and to take every opportunity of persuading them to adopt the practices, which are

of most importance to their welfare. The other method is to establish a school, in which young Indians may be instructed, and then sent back among their parents and friends, to practise the arts which they have been taught.

A combination of these two methods would certainly be more effectual than either of them by itself. In some central situation, where provisions can be most easily procured, a school should be established for the instruction of the youth; and at the same time opportunities may be found to impress on the tribes at large, a sense of the importance of the objects recommended to them.

The number of Indians that can be received in the school, must of course depend on the amount of the fund, that can be appropriated to the object. Even though the number should be small, effects of great consequence may be accomplished, if a judicious selection be made; for the young men, who obtain the benefit of instruction, will probably become leading men in their respective tribes; and their example may therefore have a very extensive effect.

In the education of these Indians, the course of instruction must be very different from that of an ordinary school, and should approach more to the system of a School of Industry; in which, agri-

culture and the mechanic arts must be among the principal objects. In guiding the Indians towards the habits of civilized life, one of the most essential requisites is to excite among them a general desire for improvement. With this view, their instruction must be directed to objects, of which the utility may be evident to the rudest savage. It is of great importance, that the young men, who are educated at the proposed establishment, should be conspicuously superior to those who have not had the benefit of instruction. They must not therefore be allowed to forget those accomplishments of savage life, without which they would be despised. They must be sent back, possessed of as much dexterity in hunting and fishing, as their companions; and their additional acquirements should be such as are most likely to be valued. Reading or writing will gain but little credit to one of these young men; but if he has learned to mend a gun, he will be highly respected in his tribe; and others will become ambitious of obtaining the same opportunities of improvement. The point of most essential importance, is to inure them, as far as possible, to habits of foresight and persevering industry; and to let them know from experience, the facility of cultivating the ground, as well as the great advantages of the practice.

The English language should be a primary object ; both as it will serve as a vehicle for farther instruction ; and as it will furnish a common medium of communication, between the Indians of different nations ; and thereby tend, in a great degree, to obviate their dissentions. Nothing indeed could have so much effect in softening their animosities, as the institution of a school, in which Indian boys of every different language will be led to associate as companions. With this view it is a fortunate circumstance, that the various nations of Indians in the Territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, are, at present, generally in a state of peace. Though they entertain strong prejudices against each other, no violent hostilities prevail, except among some of the remotest of the tribes.

To the study of English, may perhaps be added a little of reading and writing, with the first elements of arithmetic : but these are objects of secondary consideration ; and it may be a question, whether it would not be more prudent, to defer for some time any attempt to introduce this course of instruction. It must be kept in mind, that among these Indians the youth are scarcely accustomed to the smallest degree of restraint from their parents ; and it would hardly be possible to make them submit to that sort of controul, which

is exercised over children in our schools. Much address must therefore be used, to induce them to give a willing attention to the objects of primary importance ; and it would be dangerous to make too severe a demand upon their patience. Their exertions must be kept alive by the attraction of novelty, and by great variety in their occupations. Of sedentary study, a very small portion only ought to be imposed ; and it will be necessary to indulge them with large intervals of recreation, to be employed in their accustomed pursuits of hunting and fishing. On the ~~other~~ hand, as it is desirable to extend the benefits of instruction to as great a number of the Indian youth as possible, no long period can be allowed to each individual ; and that period ought not to be dissipated, by attempting too many objects at once. Upon the points of most essential consequence, all the progress that can be expected, may perhaps be gained in the course of one year, or two, at the utmost, if the efforts of the teachers be concentrated upon the primary objects only. If, with a view to more complete instruction, a few lads are to be kept at school for a long time, the number who can partake of the benefits of the institution, must be proportionably diminished.

It must be evident, that the management of such an institution, will require talents of a very different class, from those of an ordinary school-

master.—Much of the success of the plan will depend on its being entrusted to a man fully qualified for the task, and the salary ought therefore to be liberal. A knowledge of the languages spoken by the Indians in these Territories, would be a desirable qualification ; but it is not to be expected that this should be found combined with the other more essential requisites. A man who is zealous in the undertaking may soon acquire a sufficient acquaintance with these dialects ; and in the mean time he may have the assistance of subordinate teachers, who are familiar with the Indian languages. Persons sufficiently qualified for this purpose may be found among the more elderly of the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, who have long resided among these Indians. Such men may be employed not only as assistant teachers in the school, but also to visit the wandering tribes, and to call their attention to the utility of the improvements recommended to them. In process of time, it may perhaps be advisable to employ Missionaries to reside constantly among the natives ; but in the outset, occasional visits may be sufficient ; especially as the officers at the Company's trading posts, may have some influence in persuading them to commence the cultivation of the ground.

The children of the Company's European ser-

vants cannot be received as free scholars on the proposed establishment ; but considerable advantages may arise, if a school for their instruction be connected with the Indian establishment. Most of the children of half-blood, are acquainted both with the English language, and with the dialect of some native tribe ; so that they may save a great part of the expence of interpreters, and may be employed, according to the new systems of education, in the office of monitors. The parents of these children will pay for their board and education ; and the annual premium may be fixed at such a rate, as will in some degree exceed the expence. The profit which will thus accrue to the master, will render it the more easy to find a person of adequate abilities to undertake that important charge.

The Hudson's Bay Company are much disposed to promote these benevolent purposes ; and though they cannot undertake the whole expence, they have expressed their readiness to co-operate, by instructing their officers to take every opportunity of promoting the objects in view. The Company have agreed to assign a sufficient portion of good land, for raising provisions for the support of the establishment, and also to provide all the necessary buildings. But for the salaries of the master and his assistants, and the other pecuniary

expences of the proposed establishment, funds must be procured from some other source.

If that support can be obtained, there is no other difficulty to be apprehended, except those which may arise from the irregular habits of the Fur-traders, and the unprincipled manner in which they frequently encourage the Indians in the immoderate use of spirituous liquors. It is, however, a satisfactory circumstance that on this point also, the Hudson's Bay Company entertain the most liberal views, and have instructed their servants to abstain from selling spirits to the Indians, in all cases where they are not under the necessity of following the example of other traders.—It has been found by long experience, that wherever there is an active competition among the traders, the Indians never fail to give the preference to those who are most profuse in the distribution of ardent spirits. There is, therefore, little or no probability, that an effectual check can be opposed to this bane of improvement among the Indians, except through the interference of the legislature. The American government have, on this point, shown us an example worthy of imitation, by prohibiting altogether the carrying of spirits into the Indian country. Several years ago, when it was in contemplation to propose a restriction of the same nature in the British American Dominions, the Hud-

son's Bay Company expressed their frank and ready assent ; but the Canadian traders did not view the matter in the same light ; and in consequence of their threats of opposition, the measure was not brought forward in Parliament. It is, however, to be hoped, that the private interest of a few individuals, will not ultimately prevail, in defeating so beneficent a purpose, and that the interposition of the British legislature, will at length rescue the Indians, who are under their protection, from that, which the wisest among themselves have described, as the scourge of their race, and the engine of their destruction.

FINIS.

